



Gordon Kiesgen IV bagged his first turkey on IRAP leased property in Fulton County

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Popular Public Access Program Providing More Places...

By Tammy Miller, Division of Private Lands and Watersheds

"More places for outdoor recreation, please." It's a common request among Illinois citizens wanting more public access for hunting, fishing and other various outdoor activities. Meeting the public demand for access to the outdoors is a major challenge faced by the Illinois Department of Natural Resources (IDNR).

Illinois has ranked among the worst in the nation for available public land, yet is one of the most populated states. To help offset the need for more public access to outdoor acres, the IDNR applied for and was able to secure about a million dollars in 2011 to start a new public access program, appropriately named, the Illinois Recreational Access Program (IRAP). The program leases private property for a small stipend and provides the

landowner with a management plan written to create quality wildlife habitat and possible assistance in securing funds to implement the plan. Liability insurance is also provided for the landowner during time the public is accessing their property

Since its inception in the late 2011, IRAP has leased more than 13,000 acres for the following outdoor activities:

- Youth turkey hunting,
- Pond and stream bank fishing,
- Non-motorized boat launch areas on public waterways, and
- Birding and outdoor photography.

The most popular activity is youth turkey hunting. In 2014, 134 applications were received from



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youngsters (under age 16) wanting to bag a tom turkey on private land. This is a sizable increase from 99 applications in last year and 75 in 2012, IRAP's first year.

Currently, there are 28 counties in which more than 100 IRAP youth turkey sites are available for each of the three spring seasons IRAP leases property: youth season and regular seasons 3 & 4.

IRAP leased property boundaries are marked by purple paint, fence line, field or a road. IRAP signs are posted at a designated parking areas making access easy for many first time hunters.

"Absolutely fantastic! I wish the program was expanded to include other game"

-Timothy Schipou, age 12



Kasi Lackhouse with her tom turkey she took in Fulton county

Wondering how the youth turkey hunting works? Youth turkey hunters download the application from the IRAP website and request a first and second choice available county they would like to turkey hunt in. Once applications are received in Springfield by the posted deadline, staff assign each youth hunter to a site. Packets are mailed out that contain an assigned IRAP site permit, a map and directions to the site. Youth hunters are required to adhere to the IL hunting rules and regulations, have an adult accompany them who has their F.O.I.D. card and can only enter the property by foot.

"It was good because without it, I couldn't have hunted (no access to hunting grounds otherwise) "

- Luke Marsaglia, age 13

The initial funding for IRAP was only for a couple of years. Fortunately, the new Farm Bill has \$40 million in additional funding for public access. Staff are currently working on applying for additional funding to continue and expand IRAP.

More information about IRAP can be found at <http://www.dnr.illinois.gov/conservation/IRAP>



Luke Marsaglia with his first turkey !